

Wabash Reflections

September 2004

A newsletter brought to you by the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC). The Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission, representing the Wabash River Heritage Corridor, shall protect and enhance the natural, cultural, historical, and recreational resources and encourage sustainable development of the corridor.

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[Maple Syrup – Elixir of the Gods](#) [Submitted by Louise Jewell – WRHCC, Warren County](#)

There are a lot of maple syrup producers in the Wabash Valley, from the major producers, with state of the art equipment, who tap thousands of trees & end up with hundreds of gallons of finished syrup to those like us who tap maybe fifty trees and end up with about 10 gallons of gold. I say gold because after all that time and work it feels worth its weight in gold to us. And every time we use that 'gold' on pancakes, oatmeal, in salad dressing, or in any of the many recipes we've collected, it evokes the wonderful, backbreaking, and consuming time spent in the woods in February & March, tapping, collecting, cooking, straining, bottling, & storing that elixir of the gods, maple syrup.

In late winter, early spring, when day time temperatures get above freezing, but nights still get well below freezing, we troop out to the woods and check to see if the trees are 'dripping' yet. We used to use an old hand powered drill. These days we use a battery powered drill to tap the trees. We drill in at a very slight angle up about 1 to 1 1/2 inch, a good space away from previous years' drills. Sometimes, before we get the drill back out the sugar water is already running out the hole and down the tree. Even after all these years we almost always have to lean down, blow out the sawdust, dip a finger in & taste. Then gently tap in the spout with a rubber or wooden mallet. We've used all kinds of taps or spouts, from the purchased metal or plastic ones to ones we made from dowel sticks, but now usually use plastic tubing stuck directly into the tap hole & down into a hole drilled into the top side of a five gallon bucket with lid.

We've also used all kinds of collectors starting with a gallon tin can hung by wire on a nail over the tap. We've used gallon milk jugs with a hole cut in the upper side & hung on a tap. We've used galvanized buckets. Any of these methods of collecting work well for a family wanting to try making real maple syrup from the sugar water from that favorite maple tree in their front yard. Just remember, it takes 40-80 gallons of sugar water to make 1 gallon of syrup. So, it takes a lot of sugar water to end up with a cup of syrup. You might also inadvertently have taken the wallpaper off your kitchen walls from all that steam.

A real challenge to backyard sugarin' is to find ingenious ways to collect and boil down sap without spending any money. Some people admire your ingeniousness and others just look, shake their heads and wonder "Why do you go to all this work for....."

A sense of adventure helps too. It's a little like moonshinin', separating water from something else, in

a nice secluded spot, but where friends always know where to find you when they've knocked on the back door and its obvious you're not in there.

We've also used many methods of cooking down. From a stock pot over an open fire, to a big flat stainless steel pan on a big grate on cement blocks over an open fire, to a huge kettle set down in a hole cut into an old steel tank fire box. Then for years, we used a barrel wood stove with an opening cut for that stainless pan to fit down in the top. That worked pretty well, but had to watch it like a hawk because after working hard all day it could just take a little 'look away' and we'd have charcoal instead of finished syrup. And after working so hard all day, we might end up with one half gallon. But somehow, being out in the woods, with the brightness of the sun --or moon--against the snow, the sounds of nature, the smell of that sweet smelling steam, and just the fun of working together made it all worthwhile. Watching deer watch us is always breathtaking, even when you know darn well they are the same ones that scraped your new fruit trees to death or ate all the pears without leaving you any. Its also fun to watch and listen to the flocks of sandhill cranes as they head North again with their rough, trilled honks filling the air way before they come into sight.

After many years of using all these ingenious methods of cooking down the sap into syrup we invested in a hobbyist evaporator complete with its own fire box, evaporator pan, & smoke stack. We reworked an old (many years unused) eight-compartment outhouse (this used to be a wilderness girl scout camp) into a sugar house. It's just the right size and works great for its new life's work. I told you, we are an ingenious lot. It is an almost mystical experience to walk down the trail into the woods toward the sugar house, smell the sweetness before you see the steam roiling out all the openings into the crisp air or through the lantern's light if its late.

The sounds, sights, smells, & yes, tastes from even the professional sugar houses and camps with state of the art equipment, connect our senses to the past when the Indians and then the pioneers would come to a sugar bush, set up camp and produce their sweeteners for another year. After seeing first hand how long it takes to cook down sugar water to syrup, I can't imagine doing it by dropping hot rocks into a hollowed out log filled with sugar water, over & over in order to cook it down or being able to collect enough sugar water from a broken limb to cook down.

We will probably still be collecting sap and cooking it down into syrup as long as we can possibly get around in the woods. It's a ritual of spring for us. It revitalizes our bodies and renews our spirits. And it's a way of connecting, not only with the nature around us, but the people around us too.

We are still learning something new about syrup and the processes of collecting and cooking it down every year. We learn from experience, trial and error. We learn from other producers, big and small, state of the art and backyard syrupers like ourselves. We work at the Sugar Shack at the Pioneer Village at the State Fair every year and always learn something from the other workers there as well as having a great time. We are going to the National Maple Syrup Association meeting in New York this year and count on learning a lot there. But we learn most from Mother Nature herself in all her glory in February and March every year.

Treaty of Paradise Springs **Submitted by Ernest Passwater – WRHCC, Wabash County**

The 1826 Treaty of Paradise Spring opened over 500,000 acres of land north of the Wabash River to settlement. At the present site of the City of Wabash in 1826, Miami and Potawatomi Indians ceded their rights to the land north of the Wabash River to the United States at the Treaty of Paradise Springs, and the way was opened for the Government to grant land for the Wabash and Erie Canal the following year.

Men who were instrumental in implementing the Treaty were James B. Ray, Governor of Indiana, Lewis Cass, Governor of Michigan and Captain John Tipton. These men were appointed Commissioners to represent the U.S. Government. Captain Tipton was assigned the task of locating a site for the meeting.

The Paradise Springs site was chosen, as it was centrally located with a plentiful spring and enough open land to construct the Treaty Camp. The meeting lasted for approximately two weeks.

Samuel McClure arrived from Ohio to the Paradise Spring Treaty grounds in January 1827 and built a cabin three miles west near the north bank of the Wabash River. Construction of the Wabash and Erie Canal began at Fort Wayne in 1832. Large numbers of Irish laborers were brought in. Its length of 459 miles, extended from Lake Erie, was finally completed to the Ohio River in 1853. Not only was the Wabash and Erie Canal destined to become the longest canal ever constructed in America, but it also proved to be a wonderful impetus to the development of the west.

The Wabash and Erie Canal was completed across Wabash County in 1837 and on to as far west as Peru that year.

Wabash River and Fountain County Submitted by Bob Quirk – WRHCC, Fountain County

Come on John, Come on Joseph – these were the words written by Jonathan Crane after he left Ohio and come to Fountain County in 1822. He wrote, “Started on Monday morning for the Wabash County (which in 1825 became Fountain County) to look at some good places to buy. Here are thousands and thousands acres of land better than you have ever seen in your life that will dazzle your eyes to look at them. Come on John, come on Joseph, come on Samuel and whoever will come. A beautiful river (the Wabash) flows through it. Here you may raise thousands of cattle, horses and sheep, no end to the pastures moldering into the ground and nothing to eat it.”

Of course thousands did come some across country from east to west but many came up the Wabash River from the south.

The first pioneers settled along the Wabash River. The towns of Covington, Portland Arch and Attica grew along the Wabash.

Covington became the County Seat. It has had 3 courthouses. The present Court House was built in 1935 and beautiful murals were painted on the walls by local artists under the direction of Eugene Savage, a world famous muralist who grew up in Covington.

Attica has grown to be a prosperous small town. Portland Arch was by passed by the railroads and highways and has few homes but no industries.

The Wabash never developed into an important river for transportation for the movement of the products and industry or grain from the prosperous farms near it. It has however, provided recreation for water enthusiasts in the area. There are also hiking trails along the river.

Blending Arts and Commerce... Down by the Riverside \$2.2 Million Wells Arts, Commerce & Visitors Centre Also Flood-Control Model Written by Jim Barbieri originally for the News-Banner

It was almost Christmas in 2001, and Lighted Gardens north of Ossian was festively decorated for the occasion.

But the annual Christmas membership luncheon celebration of the Wells County Chamber of Commerce-Economic Development was not its customary season-bright event.

In place of the regular yuletide frivolity and joyful songfest, there were

charts and drawings and serious speeches and projections.

It was close to a full-fledged sales presentation.

With a captive audience in some awareness that a report was forthcoming, there came an unveiling of something bigger and more powerful.

Chamber president Larry Brown described the project as a greater opportunity to continue the Revitalization

downtown thrust from over a decade earlier and to complement the Wabash River Corridor, “in this beautiful location on the banks of the Wabash River opposite Kehoe Park.”

Extolled were the benefits and compatibility of the arts and commerce joining together.

Ensuing was the main course for the event. Ron Dick of the Design Collaborative architectural-engineering firm on the building structure and Kevin McCrory on the riverbank and grounds, proceeded to explain and illustrate the project and plans.

Although vastly more detail was needed in the implementing, the project was set forth in amazing accuracy and illustration on its very first presentation that December 2001 day.

And then Howard Rich and Bill Lawson stepped forward to tell how it could be done.

It was more than prophetic. Rich and Lawson had been leaders in the fund successes for Bluffton Revitalization in 1987-88, the Save the Pool drive of 1990 and the Wells County 4-H Park Community Center in 1996.

Aptly and accurately, Lawson of Franklin Electric told the chamber assemblage that in this new campaign for arts-commerce, the public perceptions and expectations would be different.

A greater proportion of the funding would be expected by the public – and by the fund leadership – to come from business-industrial-professional ranks and coffers.

Foreseen and told accurately also in this advance look was that some professional fundraising service help would be needed but not to extent of the Bluffton Revitalization campaign.

Nevertheless, in the ensuing weeks and months, there was a more revealing picture of the challenge and solution.

This was a project that had come forth right in the shadow of the September 11th (2001) attack of America and ultimately

survived during construction the Great Flood of 2003.

Preparations for the Arts-Commerce-Visitors Centre and Riverbank project had begun well before that Christmas season of 2001 public unfolding.

Notably, there had been a professional feasibility study advising that a project of about \$800,000 would be feasible – possibly up to \$1 million but more likely about \$800,000.

This could have been sobering news with a cost projection of \$1.6 million, later tapered temporarily to \$1.35 million.

The personal commitments of Rich and Lawson and their leadership impacts on others helped surmount the big fund gap.

And the Edward J. Schaefer – T. Wayne Kehoe Foundation via theses late Franklin Electric founders and their families, have been a large factor for community project support in the modern era.

By spring of 2002 there was momentum for action. Shaped was a funds campaign committee led by Lawson and Rich, with meeting at least monthly as the spring-launched drive unfolded. Lawson and Rich headed up the Lead Gifts category for the biggest size gifts.

Among key leaders on that committee were Nedra Hiday for the Arts; Ed Daisovi, John Roembke and Jim Almdale for Industry; Ralph Nowak for Retail-Commerce; Dr. Marcelo Gavilanez and Joan Gavilanez for Medical; John Whicker for Financial; Lu Ann Garton for the chamber of Commerce and Foundations; Jon Brown for Professional/Service; David Dale for Facility Oversight, and Nile Bucher as the campaign treasurer – Bucher in a truly great behind the scenes role for success.

In those early months of 2002, there was no turning back. The commitment had become total with evacuation by the Chamber of Commerce and Creative Arts from their Main-Washington headquarters and razing of those and other buildings in the Main-Washington Redevelopment Project

for the new block-long city-county parking lot.

The campaign committee was effective, efficient and rapidly successful, even though it seemed to committee members that they were having trouble getting approvals closed on too many pledges and gifts.

Exceeding about all expectations were the financial returns from the Arts Division led by Nedra Hiday backed by a host of valuable co-workers including the Creative Arts director, Maureen Butler, and one of the Bluffton area's leading talents and fine arts instructors, Beth Lampton.

By the time of the September 2002 launching of the Grassroots Division action under able leadership of Gene and RuthAnn Kyle, the overall campaign already was near the \$2 million mark, which had become the challenge goal amid the eclipsing of earlier goals.

An extra large and heartwarming gift had been from retired former Franklin Electric CEO Conrad Balentine and family.

Decided was that the project funding would be capped at the \$2 million level with the funds campaign kept going to enable special furnishing needs and an important maintenance fund.

The final funds success of more than \$2.2 million came from private donations, but there were to be two public sources.

At the starting time drew near in 2003, much money in three-year pledges could not be expected available soon. The desire was to use donated funds on the project rather than on interest.

Bluffton City Council provided the solution by contributing CEDIT (non-property tax) money to cover the interest.

Later, amid special construction cost impacts and the realization that the project was achieving a public side-benefit for needed flood and erosion control, the county government came through and the commission applied \$70,000 in CEDIT one-time funds.

James S. Jackson Co. Inc. of Bluffton was announced as the general contractor just before groundbreaking was held in May 2003 with the Chamber, Creative Arts, county and city government, towns governments, the Indiana Legislature and all the Wells County Arts, Commerce & Visitors Center committees represented, including the Guardian Group to help oversee and assure the governing of funds.

Helping contribute to the success of the project were neighboring businesses and residents near the site.

Revitalization had acquired the river-bordering tract on Water Street back in the 1990s and has made available land for the Wells County Council on Aging facility in that period.

The Wells Arts, Commerce & Visitors Centre project, with its large riverbanks improvement and beautification program included, would extend all the way eastward to Main Street.

It was well-timed for the coordinating accompaniment to the planned 2004 70th anniversary state rehabilitation of the 1934 Crosbie Main Street Bridge and addition of a pedestrian bridge about 60 feet west of the Crosbie Bridge's west wall – connecting the east end of the Wells Arts, Commerce & Visitors Centre tract with the east end of Kehoe Park.

State bidletting on state-federal-paid bridges project will be in May of this year.

Construction launched promptly from groundbreaking last May (2003) had run smack-dab into very large challenges.

One was the startling discovery that instead of mostly bedrock beyond the test borings into the riverbank, the earthworkers removed thick brush and top soil to expose unbelievable mounds of junk and trash.

Evidence was clear that in a pre-environmental period of years here, individuals and firms drove trash off the end of Johnson Street and dumped it into the Wabash River.

The hollowing from removal of junk-trash was vastly more than had been imagined needed. So the cost overrun from concrete needed to fill and fortify a solid base.

And built then to enhance, support and fortify the reconstructed south riverbank was the now widely-heralded Bluffton Great Wall – actually a double wall from the lower and upper terraces of the new facility.

Construction was slowed in mid-summer last year by the Great Flood of 2003, which had an unanticipated positive feature, however.

The Great Flood illustrated that even in the worst case scenarios, the project elevations were safe. And federal authorities were prompt in observing that a riverbanks improvement east of the Main Street Bridge could be an Army Corps of Engineers project for flood and erosion

control of the type that the Wells County Arts, Commerce & Visitors Centre project has provided west of the bridge.

Private donations and those prior-noted city and county helps overcame the unexpected problems.

It was on Feb. 14, 2004 – Valentine's Day – that the Chamber of Commerce-Economic Development moved in. Two weeks later on Feb. 28, 2004, Creative Arts of Wells moved in.

Open house visitors can see for themselves a truly beautiful, stalwart and service-ready building for the amazing, innovative blending of arts and commerce – coupled with a flood-erosion control environmental achievement and riverbank central Bluffton beautification.

Signing Off **Submitted by Susan Benner**

My first day of work with the Wabash River Heritage Corridor Commission (WRHCC) was on April Fool's Day of 2002. I was hoping that the significance of that date wouldn't be a bad omen.

Working for the WRHCC has been a tremendous experience not only because of what we do to help promote and protect the Wabash but because of the other great resource tied to the river, the people. I have had the fortune of working with countless people who amaze me everyday with their array of knowledge and their sheer passion and dedication. I couldn't have asked for any better role models/mentors/friends. My sincere thanks go out to everybody (too many to name!) for their help and support. I believe part of doing a good job is surrounding yourself with good people. Good people is one resource the Wabash River isn't endanger of losing.

It is my hope that even though my time with the WRHCC has been short I have served the people of Indiana and the river itself well. It is with a heavy heart that I leave the WRHCC, the Wabash River and Indiana. As a Hoosier I know my travels will eventually bring me back to Indiana and to the banks of the Wabash.